

Beyond Heavens Reach

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Summary: the 409th ODS'T Death Stalkers, tasked with hunting down Innies strongholds while the UNSC falls around them, can Captain Tobias Winters and the 409th hold the line between insurrection and annihilation? only the activities of a few shall decide. please read and review

1. Departure

UNSC Frigate _Beyond Heavens Reach_: _Mess Hall

March 3 2550

Black uniformed soldiers sat clustered around tables in the main mess hall of the _Beyond Heavens Reach_. Since the _Reach_ had taken on the elite unit of ODS'T's belonging to the 409th Orbital Shock Troop Battalion; the _Deathstalkers_ at their last refuelling, and since then, these ODS'T's had made it an issue to make their presence felt whenever they were grouped together._ Their presence caused the frigates compliment, even its Marine contingent that were also present in the hall, dining at the same time, to be somewhat unnerved.

Seated in the middle of one of these groupings was the _Deathstalkers_ Commanding officer, Major Tobias Winters. He sat, leant back in the rigid metal chair, his black armoured service boots resting rather precariously off the corner of the mess hall table. His service dagger; was embedded clean through an apple that he was in the process of eating. Seated at the same table was a collection of his troopers and officers, and a few uncomfortable swabbies that had the unfortunate luck of sitting on their own when the _Deathstalkers_ arrived.

Sitting beside him sat one of his platoon leaders and occasional adjutant, 2nd Lieutenant Jacinta 'Sin' Taylor; like he, she was dressed in standard ODS'T fatigues (though they did look better on her), but possessing slightly more eloquent table manners.

>Tobias was furious; news had just recently reached the ship that a company of the 409th had been slaughtered during an Insurrectionist ambush while performing a series of routine missions as part of enforcing the Cole Protocol. While the war between the UNSC and the Covenant raged, the Major had faced the Covenant only a handful of times during that war. The 409th primarily dealt with Insurrectionists, performing those tasks and missions considered to 'messy' for the 409th's more publicised sister-battalion the 105th ODS'T 'Helljumpers' Battalion to allow them to maintain the prestige and glory of being the UNSC's morale generator, Tobias made no illusions that the Deathstalkers hands were filthy with blood of terrorists, cowards and collaborators, but every trooper in his command knew that it had to be done.

"Innies; I can't fucking believe them," Tobias muttered between mouthfuls of apple, "The Covvies are on Reach's doorstep and good red-blooded marines are dying to hold the line and then you have Innies blowing up troop ships and hospitals as if somehow helping the Covvies find Earth will somehow save their skins. I don't know what angers me more, the fact that we have to go out into the black to bring the Outer Colonies into check, or the fact after twenty years; we still have to."

>Jacinta looked up from her steak after swallowing the piece in her mouth. She shook her head dismissively, "We always knew that the Innies didn't have it in them to fight by our side, they're nothing but vultures, picking at the UNSC while we're fighting the good fight, I hope the Covenant wipe them out as a favour to us."
"Hoo-Rah!" exclaimed the other ODS'T's at the table, thumping their fists on the long metal table.

Tobias put the knife down and picked up the plastic cup of water from his meal tray, "That is true Sin, and I guess that's why we are going out there to kick some Innie ass."

>"I hear that, sir," Taylor replied before the intra-ship intercom blared to life.
"This is Andariel, all non-essential personnel, as well as Marine and ODS'T personnel are to proceed immediately to cryo tubes as the ship is in final preparations to enter Slipspace," remarked the electronically generated voice of the _Beyond Heavens Reach_'s smart AI, Andariel.

>Tobias stood, the ODS'T's near him stood in reflex to his movement, "You heard the lady, head to Cryo 3, its time for the long sleep," he ordered before as one body his ODS'T's left the mess hall, he was about to join them when he stopped and looked down to see a rather dejected Lieutenant Taylor. "Problem Sin?"<p>

The female ODS'T looked up from her meal and over to her superior before shrugging. "They always do this during dinner, and that was a good steak," she moaned before collecting her field cap and joining the Captain at the door, the two proceeding towards the cryo chambers in the centre of the ship.

UNSC Frigate _Beyond Heavens Reach_: Main Bridge
>March 3, 2550<p>

Captain Nathaniel Goldstrom, the _Reach_'s commanding officer exited his wardroom and stepped onto the bridge, stopping near his raised command chair to gaze upon the massive windows that served as the ships main viewscreen, showing the other vessels assigned to the same battle group reaching the limit of the terrestrial system, he frowned when he realised that there was supposed to be a lot more vessels

present.

"Andariel, what is the status of the Battle group?" Nathaniel ordered taking his command chair from the duty officer, looking over to the small holotank that sat near his chair. There were similar tanks scattered throughout the bridge, but this was the only one that wasn't dark.

The holotank shimmered, revealing a two inch-tall red demoness, with black waist length hair, cloven feet and horns. 'She' appeared to hover above the holotank by way of a pair of black wings with beat every few seconds.

"Six vessels can hardly be called a battle group, Captain. But since you asked, the Cruiser Saratoga, Frigates; Ain't no Sunshine, Friend of Misery, Movement of the Odyssey and the Corvette Mustang are all making final preparations to enter Slipspace." the small AI representation seemed agitated with its orders, but then it was expected, AI's were usually reserved for Cruisers or Battleships, but this time in the war, there were more AI's in the fleet than Cruisers or Battleships to carry them.

Nathaniel nodded, shuddering slightly, whenever he looked at the AI he had to wonder with this nude representation of a demon was the AI's choice or some technicians. "What of our own status?" he asked signing off a report a junior officer handed him.

"The Beyond Heavens Reach is at a similar level of readiness, we have just commenced first stage of crew hibernation, which should be finished shortly, after that point the ship will be under my control for the duration of our Slipspace jump." Each word from her 'mouth' caused tiny razor-sharp fangs to become visible, increasing her sinister appearance.

Nodding once more Nathaniel turned to his Communications officer, "Signal the Saratoga, inform them we are ready to jump to Slipspace on their order, and with luck, we will meet them at the rendezvous coordinates. Engineering, prepare to bring the Shaw-Fugikawa drive online, Andariel, sync mission clock with the Saratoga's AI, and await launch orders." he ordered.

Andariel nodded before the holopad dimmed, and Andariel moved to another tank as the one located next to the Captain's chair was replaced by another AI, this one wearing a black robe with chains dragging behind it.

"I am Eternal Torment, AI of the Cruiser Saratoga, the mission clock has been reset, the battle group has one hour to make ready for the transition to Slipspace, make sure that your ship and crew are ready at that time." its hollow voice was pained filled, as if the chains that hang behind its avatar were actually constricting against its body, restricting the flow of oxygen.

Nathaniel nodded, "Understood, inform Admiral Trudy that the Beyond Heavens Reach will be ready by that time."
>Eternal Torment bowed before the holotank dimmed as Andariel resumed her position on it.<p>

"And they say I am the drama queen," she hissed, her forked tail whipping around behind her.

>Nathanial suppressed a chuckle, "Just get the ship ready for Departure, Andariel, I will be in the Wardroom if I'm needed."
"Understood, captain."

2. The Big Sleep

UNSC Frigate Beyond Heavens Reach en-route to Cryo Bay Three

>March 3 2550<p>

Jacinta fell into step behind her company commander as the two worked their way through the midst of her comrades as they bustled down corridors to the cryo-chambers. Jacinta had never really liked the concept of cryo sleep, it wasn't the undressing and standing naked in front of a bunch of men (though earlier in her career she used to get self-conscious about having to strip in front of her fellow soldiers) it was the nausea that Jacinta would always on emerging from the pod that did it. As she attempted to distract herself from the prospect the mass of ODST's entered Cryo Bay Three. Sitting against the walls, at a slight angle sat the individual cryo-chambers for the Deathstalkers. Their appearance always reminded Jacinta of metal coffins with lights, a gel bed and a window that you don't really get the chance to look through.

Approaching the chamber marked LT. J. Taylor; she placed a hand against its cold outer surface. "Into the freezer we go." She commented glancing in the direction of Tobias whose tube was next to hers at the end of the line of cryo-chambers.

>Tobias looked back over his shoulder towards the lieutenant before removing his black t-shirt and placing it on a pedestal next to his own cryo-chamber. "You still get edgy being the only girl in here?" he asked, removing his dog tags and placing them on his shirt before he checked on his troopers as they stripped and climbed into their tubes, walking up and down the twin lines of tubes, making sure that everyone was accounted for before returning to his own tube.
She shook her head when he returned to his chamber as she leant against the outer casing of her own. "No, sir, I've gotten used to being the only woman in your command section. The only issue I have, now is my not-so-iron stomach when it comes getting out." As if proving the point that Jacinta didn't have an issue undressing in front of the men she had trained and fought with; she grabbed hold of the hem of her black shirt where it met her BDU pants and lifted that right over her head along with her dog tags. Placing both articles of clothing on the pedestal near her chamber she then bent at the waist, her breasts hanging slightly, still covered by their black cloth cage, and unlaced her boots, removing them in turn and placing them at the foot of the pedestal. She then stood upright, resting her hands on the thick belt holding up her BDU pants. Her waist had a slight curve where it met her hips, but once the belt was undone her black BDU pants slid down her toned legs to the floor.

The Second Lieutenant was now clad only in standard issue black underwear as she folded and placed her trousers next to her tube. Turning back to the Captain, she reached behind and unclasped her bra, her back to the rest of the men. Removing her bra and slipping off her underwear, she placed the two articles of clothing on the pile.

>Now completely naked, the lieutenant returned her hands to her slender hips and smirked, "You don't have a problem with me being the

only girl do you, sir?" she decided to ask.
Tobias shrugged, "I'm not complaining, you are one ugly _Deathstalker_," he commented in almost a pre-rehearsed tongue-in-cheek tone before looking past the naked Second Lieutenant to pair of rookie troopers who had stopped mid-undressing to stare at the toned backside of the officer as if she was the first naked woman they had seen. "And yes the thought of your chiselled stomach turned into knots kinda ruined the image,"

>She laughed slightly, causing her breasts to jiggle slightly before she pressed the button on her cryo-chamber to begin the pre-hibernation process; Tobias did the same on his chamber, turning back to see the pair of troopers still staring.
"You've got a pair of admirers," he remarked, gesturing with a subtle head tilt, returning to his tube to unlace his boots, stripping down and placing his clothes on the pedestal.

Jacinta smirked slightly, she had regularly caught herself enjoying the occasional flirtatious comments between the two officers before she turned around to face the rookies, her facial expression returned to its normal neutral expression. Her turning towards them seemed to paralyse the pair in a daze. Pressing her lips together, Jacinta whistled sharply at the men to get their attention, she quickly slipped into her Platoon leader persona. "I know its wartime and this is probably the first time you boys have seen a woman naked before, but I like to remind you that I am even while naked, I am a ranking officer and I suggest you both get your tongues inside your mouth and undress quick smart with your eyes front and centre or I will make sure that you never see another woman again. Do I make myself clear?"

Jacinta watched the rookies snap out of their daze and undress the fast she had seen anyone strip, then rushed into their tubes. At the pace they moved she was surprised neither of them fell into the tube. She glanced across at her veteran staff sergeant who was also watching the exchange who looked like he was struggling to hold in a bout of laughter.

Tobias two, watched as Staff Sergeant Edward "Tex" Howard, suppressed a laugh at the young female officer's gumption. Sure she had only been a _Deathstalker_ for about ten months; and Tobias did admit that she was easy on the eyes; but she also has the steel-in-her-veins to stand toe-to-toe with any of the men in the unit.

>"Nicely done, Sin, but maybe next time, take it easy on the rookies, you were an FNG at one point," he remarked quietly, approaching her and placing a hand on her bare shoulder, wheeling her back towards her cryo-pod.
She flinched slightly before nodded automatically. "Yes, sir, apologies," She muttered as she was lead to her tube, she noted how warm Tobias's hand was against her cool skin and was slightly curious as to why he was leading her to her pod. Grabbing the sides of her pod, she used it to help her inside and settle on the gel bed, "Look in safe and sound, no one hurt or in trouble, sir."

Tobias smiled; he couldn't resist a peak at the athletic woman as she hopped into the pod. "Good night Lieutenant, see you in three weeks," he remarked before activating her pod. As the hatch slid closed he watched her freeze before activating the remaining pods and climbing into his own.

>Sitting up in the pod, he pressed the key sequence on the panel beside it before hopping in, activating his own pod. The access hatch

slid shut and pressurised gas filled the pod, in a second the captain was frozen.<p>

Monitoring the exchange in the Cryo-Bay, along with the automation of the _Reach_, Andariel watched through her many 'eyes' located throughout the ship, the hundreds of cameras that she used to monitor the progress of the ship and crew. She checked internal cameras for the location of the captain, and activated the holotank nearest him.

>"Captain, the crew is now in hibernation, and the battle group is ready to enter Slipspace, Shaw-Fugikawa Slipspace Drive is at full power and able to be brought online at your order." she reported, crossing one leg under the other, to make it appear as if she was sitting on an invisible chair, joining the captain at his desk in the wardroom.
"Do we have launch confirmation from the _Saratoga_?" Nathaniel asked looking up at the AI that sat at the end of his desk, as systems normally maintained by human crewmembers had now been taken care of by Andariel, the captain could hear a change in the ship as the crew went into hibernation.

Andariel's avatar dimmed as lines of code ran across her body, "The _Saratoga_ has not updated the mission clock," she replied before displaying the mission timer below her feet. **00:09:43**.

>Nathaniel nodded, before locking down his terminal and standing. "Prepare to bring the Shaw-Fugikawa Drive online, notify all personnel not yet in cryo to prepare for the jump. What is the travel time from here to the deployment area?"
The AI nodded, "Understood, Captain, all decks are reporting ready. Jump time from Antioch to Concordia is three weeks, however considering that Arcadia has fallen and has been retaken twice now. There is reason to speculate that the Covenant could be in the area."
>The captain grimaced, while he was confident about his ship and crews capabilities against Insurrectionist forces, six UNSC ships were really only for a match for one Covenant Vessel, even if one of those vessels was a Cruiser; and the likelihood of dealing with only one Covenant vessel rarely if ever happened.<p>

Shaking himself out of the depression, he looked down at the mission clock once more, "Prepare to enter Slipspace on the cue from the _Saratoga_."

>Andariel nodded before her avatar dimmed as processing power was diverted to other parts of the ship to oversee the ships transition to Slipspace.
"Understood, Captain, spinning up FTL drives. Entering Slipspace in 5...4...3...2..."

The engine pods at the rear of the Frigate glowed Blue, before the _Beyond Heavens Reach_ and the other five ships in the battle group forced their way into Slipspace, enroute to Concordia.

>Nathaniel looked over to the holotank, "The ships yours, Andariel, look after her while I'm asleep," he commented before heading to his designated cryo-tube.
"Sleep well, Captain, I will wake you on approach."

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